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SUBJECT: SUDAN/DARFUR: DECEMBER 5 P-3 CONSULTATIONS IN
PARIS

Classified By: Political Counselor Andrew Young, 1.4 (b/d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: The President's Special Envoy to Sudan, Ambassador Richard Williamson, met with P-3 counterparts in Paris on December 5 and, separately, with AU-UN Mediator Djibril Bassole to discuss Sudan, Darfur, and the Qatar process. In the P-3 meeting, the UK and France agreed with Williamson's assessment that recent events may have pushed Khartoum to a more conciliatory position but that the way forward was uncertain. The P-3 agreed to support the Qatar Initiative, with Bassole playing a central role in the process, and to maintain solidarity on the ICC issue, with no shift in position unless Khartoum's behavior changed dramatically. All agreed that Darfur rebel leader Abdulwahid el-Nur's refusal to engage posed problems and that consideration might have to be given to identifying another leader who might better represent the Fur people. In their separate meeting, Williamson expressed support for Mediator Bassole's efforts to bring all parties together within the Qatar process, focusing first on a cessation of hostilities. END SUMMARY.

P-3 Meeting

¶2. (C) Presidential Special Envoy for Sudan Richard Williamson held consultations with P-3 counterparts in Paris on December 5 before meeting separately with AU-UN Mediator Djibril Bassole. The P-3 meeting consisted of a working lunch hosted at the MFA by Eric Chevallier, MFA spokesperson and senior advisor to FM Kouchner. Also present were MFA DAS-equivalent Helene Le Gal and MFA Sudan desk officer Frederic Bouvier; Deputy Diplomatic Advisor Bruno Joubert and Technical Counselor Romain Serman (both from President Sarkozy's office); UK FCO Special Representative Michael O'Neill and FCO Sudan Unit deputy Bruce Bucknell; AF/SPG Director Tim Shortley, AF/SE senior advisor Jana Chapman-Gates, and Embassy assistant AF-watcher.

¶3. (C) SE Williamson provided an overview to begin the discussion, noting that the Qatar process was a serious one offering the best prospects for a political settlement, a process that the USG had come to support. Williamson said that Khartoum might be willing to cooperate as a result of recent developments: the impending change in U.S. administrations and the possibility that U.S. policy could become tougher, the JEM assault that nearly reached Khartoum, growing instability in Abyei and in the south, the ICC's possible indictment of Sudan President Bashir, and Sudan's failure to garner support against the ICC at this year's UNGA. AU-UN Mediator Bassole is playing an active and positive role. The potential for significant movement in the right direction is in place, Williamson reiterated. Problems of course existed, including the willingness of JEM and

Abdulwahid el-Nur to engage. Williamson noted as well misgivings on the part of Libya, Egypt, and China regarding Qatar's leadership role and the state of play.

14. (C) UK envoy O'Neill agreed with Williamson's assessment. JEM had already sent a delegation to Qatar. Abdulwahid needed to participate as well, although it was not clear how to bring him in. (NOTE: The P-3 discussed Abdulwahid several times during the meeting. In sum, all P-3 members expressed frustration at his intransigence and lack of a willingness to cooperate. Williamson expressed skepticism that Abdulwahid would ever play a constructive role and questioned his desire to do so. There was general agreement that while it was advisable to continue to encourage Abdulwahid to participate in the Qatar process, the time might come when it might be appropriate to identify other Fur leaders -- perhaps from among the SLM/AW's commanders on the ground -- who could supplant him as Fur leader. END NOTE.) O'Neill said that the UK had not had contact with Abdulwahid for several months. Chevallier said that he would meet with Abdulwahid on December 6 and that Abdulwahid had indicated that while he would not go to Qatar, he would send a delegation to test the waters, but not negotiate. Chevallier said that Abdulwahid was meeting with some of his commanders in Paris to discuss Qatar. (NOTE: Assistant AF-watcher met with Abdulwahid on December 4; he said that he would not go to Qatar as long as the Khartoum regime continued to persecute the people of Darfur and that he would not send a delegation to Qatar. END NOTE.) In response to O'Neill's question about the new U.S. administration, Williamson, who is participating in the

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transition, said that there will likely be an attention and muscularity that are hard to maintain at the end of an administration. Williamson added that he has been impressed with the approach of the transition team, and he will encourage the new administration to pursue progress through diplomatic channels during its first months in office while also developing robust options in the event of non-compliance.

15. (C) Bruno Joubert, Sarkozy's Deputy Diplomatic Advisor, said that Sarkozy met briefly with Bashir recently in Doha at the UN Financing for Development meeting and told him that "he knew what he had to do" in terms of cooperating with the international community, although Bashir said little in response. Joubert advised, and the others agreed, that irrespective of how the ICC issued played out, it was important to keep the pressure on Sudan and to continue encouraging the Qatar process. Commitment to larger objectives should not be swayed by ICC action against Bashir, which Joubert thought could take place in January 2009. On the ICC and Article 16, O'Neill restated the P-3 position, with which all agreed, that there would be no change in the P-3's stance unless there were some dramatic change in Sudan's behavior. Joubert made the point that mere cooperation with the ICC on the two Sudanese already under indictment would not constitute such a change. There had to be significant progress as well on the ground in Darfur and with respect to issues such as UNAMID and Sudan's relations with Chad before there could be any consideration given to an Article 16 procedure. Given Sudan's track record, such did not seem likely in the near term. He said that "we shouldn't water down anything" for mere partial cooperation.

16. (C) Romain Serman, AF-advisor at the Presidency, raised the idea of using the fear of ICC prosecution to create fissures within the Khartoum regime that could bring about a change in policy if not in leadership. He noted intelligence chief Salah Ghosh's concerns that the ICC would soon indict him and his desire to "save his skin."8 Serman believed that Ghosh and others might be willing to cut their own deals, or get rid of Bashir, if doing so would remove the threat of ICC prosecution. Although agreeing that Serman's idea had its merits, the others at the meeting indicated a preference for continued pressure against the Khartoum regime

as a whole rather than separate approaches towards targeted individuals. Williamson advised that the message be kept general -- no concessions on Article 16, and a focus on our central concern for concrete, verifiable progress on the ground toward humanitarian relief and sustainable security, with the possibility of enhanced cooperation with Khartoum if real progress is demonstrated in these areas.

¶17. (C) O'Neill advised that formal talks not take place in Qatar until after the ICC indicted Bashir, presumably in January. O'Neill said that the Qataris could continue preliminary work for the talks but should hold off until the ICC took action. That would allow the talks to begin with the ICC decision already in place and obviate the need to make adjustments to any talks that would have begun while an ICC decision was still pending. O'Neill also believed it advisable that the UN Security Council respond effectively to the ICC's indictment, as another means of maintaining pressure on the regime. MFA DAS-equivalent Le Gal said that AU-UN Mediator Bassole and the Qataris seemed to be working on two meetings, the first with JEM or with JEM, Abdulwahid, and perhaps SLA/Unity, and then a second meeting with all the parties, including Khartoum. She reported, however, that organizing the first meeting was plagued with complications given the difficulty of working with the rebels. O'Neill said approvingly that this scenario made it unlikely that talks in Qatar would take place prior to an ICC indictment of Bashir. O'Neill commented on the preference that the Qatar process not take shape too quickly, as he had previously signaled.

¶18. (C) Chevallier and Joubert left the meeting for other engagements. Discussion continued, largely on the issue of Abdulwahid and his intransigence. Williamson pointed out the need for a more coherent P-3 strategy on Abdulwahid and Khalil Ibrahim. The French, he said, have the most leverage with Abdulwahid so perhaps the UK and the U.S. could play a more useful role by isolating him into cooperation with the French. The French noted that Abdulwahid had become a media figure in France and that expelling him would likely cause problems for the GOF. Williamson hoped the French would

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exert whatever leverage possible to encourage him to act rather than wait on the margins.

¶19. (C) The meeting ended with P-3 members expressing general agreement with the main issues concerning Sudan -- the ICC, Qatar, and the need to pressure engagement by the rebels. They pledged to continue working together and to keeping each other informed. The French and UK representatives also expressed keen interest in the likely approach the new U.S. administration would take, with Williamson stating that the new team would take a serious and active approach to the issue.

Meeting with Bassole

¶10. (C) Later on December 5, Williamson, Shortley, Chapman-Gates and Embassy's two AF-watchers met with AU-UN Mediator Djibril Yipene Bassole and two members of his staff, Boubou Niang and Laura Diana Sitea. Williamson noted his recent visit to Qatar and his favorable impression of the process. He remarked on Bassole's important role and wished him success in winning the engagement of the rebels, particularly Abdulwahid.

¶11. (C) Bassole's delegation responded by providing an update on its own activities and its engagement with the Qatar process, including meeting with Bashir, JEM, and Chad President Deby. It was important to meet with the Qataris to understand the status of their efforts. Bassole met with Khalil Ibrahim but not Abdulwahid, who "refused to meet." Bassole was happy with the support offered by the U.S. and France. Williamson noted uncertainties about Bashir, who had indicated support for the mediator (i.e., Bassole) but whose

"commitment" to a cease fire was riddled with exceptions -- the cease fire would not apply in the case of "bandits" for example. Bassole said that, despite these concerns, Bashir seemed "sincere," with Bassole noting the perhaps limited ability of Bashir to control events on the ground. (NOTE: Bassole seemed to give Bashir the benefit of the doubt. END NOTE.)

¶12. (C) Williamson said that, sincerity aside, Bashir's support for the militias had been catastrophic and that some militia members might find a life of violence more attractive than one of peace. Bassole acknowledged this point and said that Bashir had claimed that violence arose when his forces were attacked. His recent cease fire statement had lasted only two days before violence erupted.

¶13. (C) Bassole said that his objective was to have all parties -- the Khartoum government, JEM, Abdulwahid, and SLA/Unity -- work toward a cessation of hostilities, and not simply a cease fire. After an agreement on a cessation of hostilities, Bassole said that he would work towards holding substantive meetings including all the parties. He said that he would meet with Abdulwahid on December 7 to seek his agreement to participate. Bassole was not certain that he could change Abdulwahid's mind, but he remarked that there was a need to move on "with or without Abdulwahid." Another problem was JEM, which, according to Bassole, wanted to engage with Khartoum alone. Bassole said that he told JEM that while it might play a "leadership" role in the process, it was impossible that it act "alone."

¶14. (C) Bassole's associate Boubou said that a Bashir-Deby meeting might also be possible. Bashir expressed to Bassole a willingness to meet with Deby in El Fasher, after the Dakar Contact Group meeting scheduled for January in Khartoum. Boubou said the Bashir-Deby meeting could therefore take place late in January. When Williamson mentioned Libya, Bassole said there had been plans for Bashir and Deby to meet in Libya but he did not know why that had not happened. Williamson commented that the power relationships of Bashir and Deby were not symmetrical -- Bashir had far more leverage over the Chad rebels than Deby had over JEM, which could obtain support elsewhere. Williamson thought that Deby would be happy to be rid of the Chad rebels but he would have problems breaking ties with JEM, in part because of Zaghawa clan issues. Bassole indicated agreement with this view and reiterated his intention to get all parties involved in what he hoped would lead to a cessation of hostilities. Bassole seemed convinced that Deby sought to be engaged, wanted to be seen as a peacemaker, and wanted input into a solution to the region's problems.

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¶15. (C) Bassole understood that Bashir's indictment by the ICC was likely to happen in January. As mediator, he said he took no position on the ICC issue -- it was not part of his mandate and he wanted to remain impartial. If Bashir were indicted, Bassole said that he did not know how the peace process would be affected. It was quite possible that neither the government of Sudan nor the rebels would be inclined to cooperate further. Williamson explained the USG's position and the need for Sudan to cooperate fully on all issues and to effect meaningful change on the ground.

¶16. (C) Asked about cease fire monitors, Bassole repeated that he was seeking a cessation of hostilities and not just a cease fire. That was his first objective. This would hopefully lead to improved security in Darfur. Bassole acknowledged the need for a monitoring mechanism. Williamson raised an SPG proposal for a monitoring mechanism that has been proposed to UNAMID and the GOS. Whatever mechanism is best, he said, we stand ready to assist, and AF/SPG Director Shortley could provide more information as needed.

¶17. (C) Bassole said that he had talked to Minni Minawi,

who sent unclear signals on the role he might play in the peace process. Minni Minawi said he would not participate as a member of the Khartoum government or as a member of the rebel contingent. Bassole said that Minni Minawi could play an important role and that this was under consideration. Bassole said that questions about Minni Minawi's role led to questions about the viability of the DPA itself and whether it was "still alive." Bassole said he would continue studying Minni Minawi's possible role in future events. Williamson agreed on the possible need to repackage the DPA, which contained useful elements but carries a great deal of baggage. Williamson and Bassole then discussed the role of civil society in the peace process, an issue that also touched on the leadership roles of the rebel factions.

¶18. (C) Echoing comments made at the P-3 meeting, Bassole mentioned the problems posed by Abdulwahid, including the possible need to tell him that the "train was leaving the station" and that he needed to join the process or be left behind. Bassole stressed as well the need to get the JEM and SLA/Unity involved in his proposal for a cessation of hostilities. In response to Chapman-Gates's question about how the P-3 could assist, Bassole repeated his intention to organize meetings centered around Doha featuring participation by all the parties. He said that the P-3 could play a useful role in promoting his efforts and encouraging the parties to engage, including Abdulwahid and the other rebel leaders.

¶19. (C) The meeting concluded with Williamson and the other USG officials promising to remain in touch with Bassole and his mediation team and to offer its support where possible.

¶20. (U) SE Williamson has cleared this message.

PEKALA